

A REVIEW OF BRITISH BUTTERFLIES IN 1983

By Dr. C. J. LUCKENS *

Warm weather soon after the New Year in 1983 produced some unusual butterfly records. The strangest of these was in the Malvern area where a presumed Holly Blue butterfly was disturbed from a winter log pile on January 8th. There were also records of *Aglais urticae* L. from various parts of the country around this time.

April was one of the wettest on record but because of the build up of butterfly numbers the previous year the hibernators turned out in strength whenever the sun did appear. While riding in company with my wife and eldest son in the woods between Owslebury and Winchester on April 15th, one of those rare sunny spring days, all the early spring butterflies were to be seen in profusion. In fact I cannot remember ever before seeing so many post hibernation *Nymphalis io* L. at the one time. Every substantial nettle patch was patrolled by several Peacocks and as we rode through one sunlit glade at the edge of the downs, near Cheesefoot Head, I counted 12 *io*, 3 *urticae*, 4 *Polygonia c-album*, and 6 male *Gonepteryx rhamni* L.

Spring *Pararge aegeria* L. were much later in emergence than usual and it was mid May before I saw them in any numbers near here — this time in a wood near West End. The reports seemed to indicate that *aegeria* had a mediocre year in the spring hatch but the summer broods tended to be better than average. The Speckled Wood persists in the isolated north east Scottish localities, where specimens were seen on August 10th at Munloch in the Black Isle. *Lasiommata megera* L. had a good year generally, though in mid Sussex numbers were low, even in the late summer brood. In the north, it is only during the last decade that the Wall Brown has invaded Northumberland, but it is now one of the commonest butterflies along the Tyne Valley. It was also frequent in some coastal Cumbrian sites.

Among the other Satyrids, 1983 was a year of expansion for Ringlet colonies throughout England. In Wessex, it was later than usual in appearance, but occurred plentifully. Excellent numbers were reported from the lanes of East Kent and similar reports were obtained from North Dorset where form *arete* was not uncommon. Many of the paler, greyish, northern form were seen at Great Orton, Carlisle on July 7th. *Maniola jurtina* L. also flourished in most areas, and a strong colony near Shaftesbury, Dorset produced a remarkable crop of rare varieties. Most lepidopterists were agreed on the abundance of *Pyronia tithonus* L. in 1983 — it seems to have been building up numbers almost everywhere during the last few

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seasons. Until the late 1970s it was fairly uncommon in Thanet and now outnumbers *jurtina* in that part of Kent.

Eumenis semele L. was as abundant as usual at Portland, (with ab. *holanops* present) and reasonable numbers appeared at Ballard Down near Swanage. *Semele* continues to turn up in the Folkestone area (one was reported from the Leas in 1983) though unfortunately I have no further reports from Folkestone Warren, where it has been making something of a comeback in the last few years. The Grayling continues to hang on precariously in one or two downland sites in east Sussex, and in one of these up to 20 were noted in mid August. The Marbled White also had an excellent season, with local abundance in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. In the Midlands *Melanargia galathea* L. is on the increase in Worcestershire with a tendency to spread north. There was a definite sighting in Wyre Forest and the first specimen in nearly 30 years was recorded from near Stafford. *Coenonympha tullia* Müll. was reported commonly throughout its range in Northern England and Scotland in 1983, with a marked increase in numbers in Northumberland where it is normally a scarce butterfly. Regarding its near relative *Coenonympha pamphilus* L., I have had the definite impression of a falling off in abundance in the last few seasons. Once one of the most ubiquitous butterflies, I now find it quite local in this area of southern Hampshire and virtually confined to the chalk. Below average numbers were also reported from Kent, parts of Sussex and Rosshire. It is perhaps a butterfly whose fortunes often go unnoticed, because of its generally accepted banality. *Erebia aethiops* Esp. in Scotland was noted as especially common in Strathglass, in the northern Highlands, at the end of July. At Arnside, Cumbria, the famous colony of this butterfly was down in numbers however, and one recorder saw only 20 or so on a fine sunny day in mid-August. *Erebia epiphron* Knoch on the other hand showed a more than 90% increase from the previous year in one Cumbrian colony.

After the poor spring (and some unsettled periods in late June), most regions of Britain enjoyed superb weather thereafter until early September, Owing perhaps to these cold conditions earlier on in the season the emergence of some species was markedly retarded. The fritillaries *Argynnis aglaia* L. and *Argynnis paphia* L., for example, were both virtually absent until the second week of July, and *Limenitis camilla* L., though subsequently common in nearly all its localities, appeared only a few days earlier. The White Admiral is another butterfly which appears to be gaining ground in the west Midlands, with records from Warwickshire and Worcestershire — one was even recorded in the built up part of Worcester itself. In general the woodlanders had a good year particularly in the southern English woods. *A. paphia* L. was scarcer than usual in Wyre forest however, and *Argynnis adippe* L. had a poor year in the

Malverns. The High Brown Fritillary still hangs on in one site in Hampshire, but sadly the overall picture in the south is one of continuing decline. *Leptidea sinapis* L. the Wood White, failed to come up to expectations when I visited the Chiddingfold/Plaistow area on June 10th, and it was also reported as very scarce in the Worcestershire/Hereford localities.

In the same Sussex woods where *sinapis* was scarce, the Purple Emperor positively flourished in 1983. It was relatively common in all its favoured localities and its magnificent dark wings were seen in several newly-recorded sites. Still no records appear from the former Northamptonshire colonies, but there were three reputable sightings in Worcestershire in 1983. Though it was well into the second week of July before the emergence started, the flight period extended throughout August. There was one unusually early sighting of the Purple Emperor, in the New Forest on June 24th. This was witnessed by three people, in an area a few miles south of Lyndhurst, where, to my knowledge, *iris* has not been recorded for many decades. In view of this exceptionally early date in a late year, one wonders if it was perhaps a release.

Some of the other Nymphalids, such as *Polygonia c-album* L. had a very mediocre year and though many Peacocks survived the winter, the summer hatch was poorer than usual. A similar situation occurred with the Small Tortoiseshell which was remarkably scarce in many areas throughout the season. Records for *Vanessa atalanta* L. were also sparse, but it was recorded from the coast of Kent to Muir of Ord, Rosshire, and also from the Isle of Handa, Sutherland on 26th July. *Vanessa cardui* L. was very scarce indeed. I saw perhaps half a dozen flying with the clouds of *Colias croceus* Geoff. in a Dorset lucerne field near Corfe in mid August, and several appeared on Buddleia at Pegwell Bay, Kent at the end of July, but elsewhere only singletons were recorded at any one time.

The Small Fritillaries has a patchy time, *Clossiana selene* D. & S. did well in Scotland, particularly in Argyleshire, and was noted in a new locality at Fannich, Invernesshire. In Cumbria it appeared in good numbers only at Great Orton, near Carlisle. *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. on the other hand, was scarcer than usual in the west Highlands, but in eastern Scotland, where it is usually very local, it was recorded at Munlochry in the Black Isle on June 10th. This fritillary was frequent at some of the Cumbrian colonies, at Arnside and Gaitbarrows. At Howe, it was seen from June 7th to July 9th. In the south the main problem for the small fritillaries is habitat deterioration, and it is highly worrying to see the gradual diminishing of both butterflies and suitable sites in famous localities such as the Chiddingfold woods. In Kent the very existence of the two *Clossiana* is in doubt though 12 years ago *euphrosyne* at least, was locally abundant in the wealden woodland

around Ham Street and Great Chart. Nevertheless, Kent still retains strong populations of *Mellicta athalia* Rott. which had a good year in Blean Woods in 1983. There were healthy signs of colony expansion and there was a report of several hundred flying in one area of coppiced chestnut on July 5th.

Several colonies of *Hammaris lucina* also persist in Kent, usually at very low levels. That they are somewhat precarious is illustrated by one population in woodland near Chartham where there was an increase in 1983 but only a dozen individuals were noted. The Duke of Burgundy had a good year in several Lake District localities, though it has disappeared from one site in this area due to Forestry Commission activity. At the well known north Yorkshire site near Thornton Dale, only six *lucina* were seen and here photographers outnumbered butterflies by 2 to 1! Over two dozen *lucina* were seen by the same recorder in another locality in the same area near Pickering. At least 20 sites for this butterfly are known from the Gloucestershire Cotswolds and it appeared in several new places in North Dorset in 1983. Another local insect, *Euphydryas aurinia* Rott., had a generally good year. It was relatively abundant in the isolated Worcestershire site and this was thought to be due to habitat improvement. In Cumbria there have been recent reports of decreasing numbers and local extinction, so it is a pleasure to learn that, in two sites at least, the butterfly is doing well. In one of these 27 webs of larvae were noted in 1983.

The Holly Blue also appeared in Cumbria, but only spring brood examples were recorded here. Both broods appeared in Southern England — though the first was weak in most areas. Between mid-July and early August numbers built up and the summer brood appeared throughout southern England from Kent to the Midlands. In the Folkestone area they could be seen in plenty every fine day from July 25th till August 20th — especially along the Leas. In Thanet it is apparently a common insect most years in the parks and gardens of towns. Reports of the Holly Blue also appear from Kew, Surrey, with great regularity. In the Brighton area the Holly Blue made a modest comeback in 1983, but the second brood larvae suffered when a late summer gale blew salt inland for miles, causing death of both food plant and young caterpillars.

The hot July/August weather encouraged the late broods of *Aricia agestis* D. & S., *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. and *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. to flourish remarkably, but sadly *Lysandra coridon* Poda failed to share in this *Lycaenid* bonanza. It was reportedly down on numbers in most localities, including Portland. The Adonis Blue did especially well in the Isle of Wight, and at Ranmore Surrey. All areas, with the exception of

north east Scotland reported a bumper year for *icarus*. *Cupido minimus* Fuessl. had mixed fortunes. A very local colony in the border counties had reduced to only six specimens, after a count of 50 specimens the previous year. A new Cumbrian locality was discovered late in the season, (July 8th) with a population of about 10 at that date. In southern England the first brood was late, with a peak emergence in the third week of June. Possibly this explains the poor showing in the second brood, which was virtually non-existent away from the coastal localities. *Aricia artaxerxes* Fab. was back to usual strength in the borders after a population explosion in 1982. In Perthshire about 40 were recorded flying around one small birchwood.

Among the Hairstreaks extremes of abundance and scarcity were apparent. The Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* L. had a disastrous season throughout the south, probably because of the unsettled cold weather during much of its flight period. In north east England the very local colonies did quite well however. The Purple Hairstreak, in contrast, was unusually abundant, being noted at many new sites throughout southern England and the Midlands. This does not necessarily indicate expansion of range, and one recorder made the point that most observers fail to scan the tree tops patiently enough to record *Thecla quercus* L. during periods of average population density. In east Kent *quercus* was undoubtedly about in exceptionally large numbers, particularly in the Blean area, where both woodland and isolated roadside oaks were favoured. Throughout Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire, this pattern was repeated — of exceptional numbers and ubiquity. *Thecla betulae* L. also had a good season, with local fluctuation on the credit side in Worcestershire and Hampshire. *Strymonidia w-album* Knoch at least held its own in the west Midlands in 1983 and several new localities were discovered in Hampshire and Sussex for this now intensely local Hairstreak.

Many people commented on the disappointing numbers of *Antocharis cardamines* L., but I personally found it as frequent as ever in this area of Hampshire. In mid May it was especially abundant at Nursling, on the western outskirts of Southampton. In northern England *cardamines* maintains the foothold gained after its expansion in the 1970s and is now found commonly along the Tyne valley. In north east Scotland it seems to be continuing its spread along the Beaully Firth and was recorded in a new locality at Redcastle on May 23rd.

Hesperia comma L. had a successful season in 1983. At its only known Kentish locality it was recorded much more commonly than in the three previous years. It yet survives in the isolated Gloucestershire site, though I understand the terrain there is an unusual one for this species. It was well up to strength though late in emergence in Hampshire, and in Surrey and Oxfordshire numbers were good. In east Sussex it still holds on in the sole remaining

locality near Alfriston. Encouraging reports were received of *Carterocephalus palaemon* Pall. in the west Highlands. Numbers were maintained in most localities and markedly increased in a few. *Palaemon* has a flight habit of darting to swift invisibility; it can survive at very low density; it can be intensely local. Unrecorded now for nearly a decade in the woods of the Midlands, might it still survive there at low density?

Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the following lepidopterists for their contributions to this year's review: A. J. Baldwin, R. D. Barrington, T. Bernhard, R. W. Carr (per J. M. C-H), J. M. Chalmers-Hunt, R. M. Craske, D. Dey (per J. M. C-H.), J. E. Green, D. C. Hulme, M. Enfield, M. J. Y. Foley, D. B. Furmage, T. Melling, C. J. Randall, Rev. J. Vine-Hall, and Miss E. J. Warren. Many of the above-named faithfully send seasonal reports each year and to them I am particularly indebted. A special thank you also to Mrs. F. Moffat who, with a classification list before her, patiently types these reviews and other papers.

A Bibliography of Irish Entomology by J. G. Ryan, J. P. O'Connor and B. P. Beirne. 4to., portrait, 372pp., stiff wrapper. Edition limited to 500 copies. 1984. The Fly Leaf Press, 4 Spencer Villas, Glenageary, Co. Dublin, Ireland. Price IR £12.

The compilers have combined successfully to produce this useful work from an amalgamation of B. P. Beirne's *Annotated and Classified Bibliography of Irish Entomology (to 1948 for Lepidoptera; 1946 for other orders)* (published in 1979) and a bibliography by J. G. Ryan and J. P. O'Connor of all references published since those dates, and up to and including 1980. It is in fact an attempt at listing all papers, articles and notes published during the whole of this period dealing with or mentioning Irish insects, and contains over 5000 references.

Broadly speaking, the references are classified under their respective orders excepting those that treat of more than one order, in which case they are listed in the "General Papers" section. References dealing primarily with parasitic Hymenoptera are listed under Hymenoptera even though their non-Hymenopteran host may be mentioned in the text. References dealing with the occurrence, importance or control of insects as pests are listed separately under "Pest Control". With each order the items are arranged alphabetically under authors, then chronologically under authors' names.

Well presented and printed on a good paper in an easy to read type, this strictly limited edition is exceptionally good value for money — J.M.C.-H.